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## HARMONY OF COLOR.

HARMONY in color treatment has a fascination which renders it essential to complete satisfaction or pleasure. It may be described as the symmetrical correspondence of hues, a unity worked out as a calculated effect, which, whilst enhancing the value of each part, gives to the whole an individual expression.

The effect lies in true balance of quantities, and still more in the artistic arrangements of tints with reference to the design considered in itself or to its surroundings, the latter general feature of harmony possessing the characteristics known in decorative work as adaptation, or suitability to its purpose.

The very essence of beauty is harmony, of which there are two sorts, that of resemblance and that of contrast; the former realized by tender gradation of tints, the latter by opposing contrasts, as between two complementary colors, or neutral and positive colors judiciously selected. The harmony that may be established between colors themselves is the mere alphabet of the colorist who has to select and dispose them in reference to design.

As form contrasts with form, so color with color, not form with color or color with mass, but a double or compound contrast may take place, as when a small portion of brilliant color gives effect and life to a larger surface of neutral tints. The smallness of the area of the brilliant color contrasts with the large size of the surface opposed to it, and the brilliancy itself with the quietness of the surrounding colors. In a large colored design the fewness and simplicity of arrangement of certain tints may contrast with the number and complete arrangement of higher or lower hues.

Nature imitates, in many instances, the productions of art, but we regard these with very different feelings from those excited by the richly colored and picturesque details of designs.

As to colors themselves, we get none equal in purity to the dispersed rays of the prism. Let blue and yellow glass be separately intensified by placing a number of pieces of each together, the blue becomes purplish and the yellow reddish. The blue is not that of the prism. Again, if a red and white flower be viewed through red glass, both will appear almost white, which would not be the case were the red absolutely pure or up to the standard of the prism.

Indeed, none of the tints of nature can be matched. Our green colors are blended with more red than is generally surmised; none completely correspond to the tints of leaves, light or dark. The impurity with which colorists have to struggle is further evident from the circumstance that if fine red and green glass are placed together, they exclude every ray of light. We work, not only with impure colors, but artistic judgments as to their characteristics, positive and relative differ, so affecting results.

The effect of one color on another, or of one group on another group, is a subject too wide to enter on. It is sufficient to state that a knowledge of the mutual or reciprocal effects of color, whether in juxtaposition or distributed in compositions or designs, is the groundwork of the colorist's art. He proceeds thence, to subordinate the colors he employs to some predominant tone. In studying those effects he meets with such surprising facts that black as a ground will impart red to ornaments imposed on it; that red does not give yellows a reddish tint but gilds them, and that yellow and orange yellow, contrasted with black, increase the purity of the black, besides being in no way themselves lowered in tone; that a white ground does not lessen the olive gray tint of gilt. There are subtle ties in the art of associating colors, with reference to harmonious results, that will bear a life time of observation.

The circumstance that middle tints unite opposing colors, provides a means for the assistance of harsh contrasts. Accepting the color that predominates in an assemblage of tints, it is not difficult to produce a harmony; the character of which will be determined by the leading color. There are vague likes and dislikes of certain colors with individuals, but in employing any colors in a composition of which the accessories to the design are skillfully presented so as to produce an harmonious whole, all tastes will be propitiated.

So powerfully does unity of expression tell upon

sensation and judgment. As for those who never go beyond the sensations produced by color and form, esteeming the most skillful colorist the one who introduces the most vivid hues, their case is hopeless. The limitations and restrictions of color to its purpose as applied, must enter as an element of judgment in determining propriety of treatment. It is folly to draw an analogy between painting on canvas to be framed, and the coloring imposed on architectural features, the forms of which are already set. In one and the other, however, the same principle of harmony will assert itself, such as that strong positive colors should only be sufficient to give beauty to the details.

In architectural embellishment, the forms of parts to which pure color is applied necessarily affects the *ensemble*. The greater the number of colors, the more difficult the task to produce a harmonious composition.

There would appear at the present time too great a tendency in colors, as applied to architectural or constructive features, to indulge in delicate, almost expressionless, neutral tints, weak in their effects, instead of employing luminous colors, which may always be toned down to meet requirements, by the introduction of a few pure tints. We like a brilliant sun; the colors of nature are never complained of as too intense, but decorative artists, whether on account of being engirt by inapplicable theories, or being in a maze when passing beyond the simplest elements of coloring, leave us to tameness, sombreness, or inane prettinesses.

Harmony may be attained by brilliancy of coloring and effect, such as render decoration prominent and attractive, as well as by the whole coloring and ornamentation being of a subdued and unobtrusive character, such as is obtained by broken tints or colors, with a sparing use of positive colors, only sufficient to give beauty to the details. It is folly to affirm that bright colors will be injurious to interiors if freely used.

Large masses of bright color, indeed, are not wanted for the limited area presented in house decoration, but it may be asked, if color decoration is not to present a certain degree of prominence, why should it exist at all? Architects, so far as they influence decoration, appear to incline to pale neutral tints, even in the selection of wall paper, on the ground that these set off, to best advantage, molded ornamental details, and apparently enlarge interior spaces.

The fine English lady who thought that the use of paupers was to enrich landscapes with their red cloaks, may be credited with, at least, a fair notion of effective contrasts in coloring. The repose which constitutes the best result of harmonious coloring is not a synonym for that faint rendering of color on walls and other surfaces which leaves the mind of the beholder wholly at rest through not exciting any particular attention. Color is a thing to be enjoyed, and that heartily.

Apparently the prevailing fear is that harmony will be sacrificed, or, at least, be endangered by the free use of colors that rank high in the chromatic scale. Countless instances of interiors architecturally imposing, could be named, where the opportunity of splendid colored effects has been foregone. It was with no such timorousness that in the Elizabethan period elaborately carved wainscottings and oaken roofs were covered with white plaster for colored enrichments that added variety of tints to beauty of form.

Decorators would, undoubtedly, be bolder were they not so trammelled by many absurd rules laid down for their guidance, as for instance, that if walls, friezes, and ceilings are to glow with brilliancy, the effect will be injured, and their efforts rendered nugatory, should everything else in the room not correspond in brilliancy. But why should brilliancy in decoration not be resorted to when the principle of relief as between it and the ordinary hues of furniture, affords such an inexhaustible resource for rendering it effective?

An instance of how far false deductions obtain a place in color theories, and are set up as binding, though absolutely incapable of application, is the conclusion reached from the assertion, by no means satisfactorily proved, that three, five, and eight are the proportions of the several colors of the prism increasing in arithmetical ratio in secondary and tertiary hues, namely; that for perfect color compositions, the same proportions must be maintained. This proposition is republished as a dogma in the *Grammar of Ornament* of Owen Jones, not only without comment, but without a single illustration.

Where nature wins admiration is in the presentation of strong neutral tints, not the weak tints of a host of modern decorators, her sparkling effects being induced by a few bright scattered flowers in positive colors; these colors,

if in masses, never fail to be fatiguing to the sight, and consequently are inharmonious. This indulgence in neutral tints allows of that free play in contrast of tone seen in the changes which the seasons bring, and abounding in harmonious effects. In any combination nature brings about, we cannot get three of yellow, five of red, and eight of blue.

The color theories of modern books going into the question of shades, harmonies, hues, and contrasts, were not the bases on which the grand old mosaicists of Palermo, Ravenna, and Rome, and the painters of Assisi and Venice lavished such vivid coloring on their productions. Their triumphs were due to the power of conceptive and observant genius, steadied by the traditions of the times before them. They executed freely what we attempt timidly, justifying this course by intellectual deductions from the prism theory.

The combination of tints which compounds admit with a green tint predominating more or less, are simply infinite, differences being further modified by the intensity of that hue. The colors may be generally classified as warm or luminous, cold or sombre. The scale of these compound colors is indicated by their alliance in hue to the tones of the primary colors. The changes as rendered by combinations of tints are matter of ordinary observation, but not so the combinations themselves, which require together with a knowledge of the scale, a practised eye for their detection.

The skillful treatment of brilliant colors, a treatment free from any violently glaring effects, is best illustrated by great examples, when the colorist was not embarrassed by complex and inapplicable theories, and nevertheless brought out perfectly harmonious, presenting to the eye what the harmonious concert of music does to the ear. In old churches and their attached chapels in Europe, the walls of which are painted in vivid colors almost beyond belief, such as the most gorgeous ceiling would seem unequal to surmount, reliance for unitary effect is the *tout ensemble*. The securing of relief is placed in the natural tints of columns that stand out unadorned against the gorgeous background, their polish at times aiding the effect, as well as gray old roofs. So in rooms, highly illuminated walls are far from being injured by the more sombre hues of furniture any more than by carpets luminous in their tints without being flashy.

We are told to introduce such designs in walls as that the two sides of a frame shall not unequally cut the details of a pattern, but the designs on walls are more considered in their entirety by spectators than is generally allowed, although, unlike the ceiling, portions of the space were necessarily hidden. Night's firmament is still glorious, though some of the constellations lie hid by clouds. The mind, or if you will, imagination, sets them in their place.

Another error must be pointed out, namely; that color decoration, however harmonious in itself, will appear incongruous if the colors be not selected so as not to give to one material the semblance of another, as for instance, that a wooden surface should have different treatment from that applied to stone, plaster, or iron. In medieval coloring, the decorators put in such color as best suited them, heedless of what it covered, and if plaster would make a better ground for their purpose than stone or wood, they did not hesitate to apply it.

The Greeks, for the sake of after coloring effects, plastered over their marble, knowing that the character of the material could, in an architectural structure, be sufficiently judged by its adjuncts, that wood or stone would show what they were by bearings, thicknesses, and supports.

"I well remember," says T. Hayter Lewis, "seeing at Girgento two coats of plaster over the beautifully rich tinted stone, the under one vermillion, and the upper white, as though the color and proportions had been displeasing and the work recolored and enlarged. Again, at the Cathedral of Messina, perhaps the most magnificently colored open timber roof existing, the whole of the timbers have been covered as a vehicle for the painting by a coating, not of size, but of delicate plaster."

A word as to stained windows: Stained windows of old were mainly regarded as a method of decorating by color, and so long as there was variety and harmony, the picture was merely a secondary matter, modestly allowing the window to be rather admired for the effect of its color on the rest of the building, than because of the picture represented by it. It was subordinated to general harmony, and on this account was not encumbered with the abounding shadows in numerous windows in which a picture is composed in forgetfulness that the first purpose of a window is to give light.